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OPINION

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History shows that pandemics lead to fascism

by Shira Lurie November 18, 2024

Studies of the 1918 flu pandemic shows correlation with the rise of fascism in the following decades.

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Donald Trump at a rally in August of 2024. Credit: Gage Skidmore / Flickr

Trump's re-election rocked the world. Many Americans, as well as foreign onlookers, watched the results come in with shock and dismay, wondering how millions could have voted to put a man so hostile to American institutions back in the White House.

Here in Canada, Trump's resurgence increased concern in left-leaning circles about the outlook for our upcoming election. Pierre Poilievre's Trumpian politics are undeniably popular, and he seems poised for a majority government.

How do we make sense of these troubling trends?

Mark Twain said, "History does not repeat itself. But it rhymes." And even an amateur poet can notice a glaringly relevant historical fact: pandemics encourage eugenics, which provides fertile soil for fascism to bloom.

Most are unaware that the 1918 flu pandemic killed an estimated 50 million people – more than died in the First World War. The uncontrolled pandemic fueled an increasing emphasis on the pseudoscience of eugenics, the idea that humans can improve their gene pool by facilitating the breeding of "desirables" and preventing the reproduction of

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facilitated widespread acceptance of this calculation. Eugenic legislation increased in the years that followed, including forced sterilization laws in several American states.

Eugenic reasoning powered the fascist movements of the 1930s and 1940s. The far-right ideology of scapegoating undesirables and, eventually, seeking to exterminate them was an extension of accepting a hierarchy of humanity. Indeed, **one study** has found that in Italy, each death per 1,000 from the 1918 flu in a given region correlated with a four per cent increase in the 1924 vote share of the Fascist Party. **Another study** noted a similar association in German voting patterns in 1932 and 1933.

Can you hear the rhymes?

In 2020, Biden and the Democrats rode to victory on a wave of anger at Trump's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. But mere months into his presidency, Biden abandoned COVID protections in favor of a "return to normalcy." Notably, this decision was not based on scientific evidence, but rather **a strategic memo from Impact Research**, a consulting firm, aimed at winning re-election in 2024.

Troublingly, those within and outside the U.S. embraced Biden's new narrative that Covid was only a danger to the "vulnerable," and not something most had to worry about. Leaders replaced the community care language of 2020 – "bend the curve," "your mask protects me, my mask protects you" – with a reaffirmation of individualism. People could choose to mask if they wanted and those at highest risk should stay home.

Even Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Left's darling of the early pandemic, proudly embraced eugenics. In August 2023, he reassured the BBC that "the vulnerable will fall by the wayside. They'll get infected, they'll get

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Amidst all of this, the rates of death and disability from COVID have remained high. Under Biden, over 800,000 Americans died from acute COVID – this does not include the increase in all-cause mortality due to COVID's vascular damage nor the millions disabled by Long COVID. Over the last few months, the U.S. has averaged over 1,000 deaths per week. In Canada, COVID remains the third leading cause of death, behind heart disease and cancer. Our Chief Science Advisor has described the ongoing pandemic as a "mass disabling event."

This is the supposed price of "normalcy" – and it should give us immense concern how willing most of us have been to pay it. In just five years, we have agreed that we would rather sacrifice some people rather than adapt to protect everyone.

Want to resist creeping fascism? Put your mask back on.

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FASCISM PANDEMIC

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